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THE DOCUMENTARY IDEA

A Critical History
of English-Language
Documentary Film and Video

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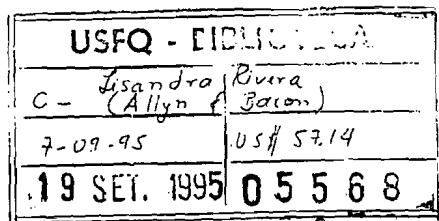
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For Shirley, David, and Cameron



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PREFACE

The title of this book is intended as an oblique homage, a small obeisance, to John Grierson, British documentary film pioneer and leader. His name will appear prominently in the pages following. It was Grierson who first used the word *documentary* in relation to film. He came to prefer that the word stand for a concept, a purpose, an *idea*, rather than for a film mode. As an idea, documentary allowed for the use of many means of communication to contribute to social betterment, Grierson's ultimate goal. When he started his work in the 1920s, he decided that, given his intentions, the motion picture would be the most effective medium for him to use.

Film could record the world around us, "the living scene," as Grierson put it, more fully and accurately than any of the other arts or media of communication. This is what his friend Robert Flaherty had attempted in *Nanook of the North* (1922) and in *Moana* (1926). The latter film was the first to which Grierson applied the term "documentary." Where Grierson departed from Flaherty was in bringing this observation of actuality back from the distant lands and vanishing cultures of the Eskimos and the Polynesians to the here and now of modern, urbanized, industrialized societies. Rather than merely recording actuality, Grierson used film to try to motivate those societies to action and to guide the courses of their action. His metaphor for the contrast between Flaherty's way and his own was that Flaherty used film as a mirror while he was more interested in using it as a hammer—presumably to knock down the old and construct the new.

The documentary idea, in the theory and practice of Grierson and others, rests on artistic forms used to articulate and advance social purposes. Though the subtitle of this book promises a critical history, before commencing that history I will discuss further what documentary means. The descriptions and definitions that begin this book include assumptions and observations about why and how documentary is made, and about the intellectual contexts and historical precedents of its development. The bulk of the book concerns the evolution of documentary functions and forms.

Documentary originated in the 1920s in North America, the Soviet Union, France, Germany, and Holland. These sources were drawn upon by Grierson at the end of the twenties in his formation of the British documentary movement. British documentary of the 1930s then became a model for documentary development elsewhere. This chronicle follows the coherent main line of the English-language documentary in Great Britain, the United States, and Canada, up to the present.

Along the way a look is taken at contemporary French documentary, which provides a cross-cultural comparison (contrast really) with the dominant Anglo-Saxon line. Also surveyed are some recent developments out of aesthetic and political modernism beginning in Europe in which filmmakers have attempted to create new forms by mixing documentary actuality with narrative fiction and avant-garde experimentation.

The final chapter returns to the English-language tradition and North America. Mainly it concerns the large-scale political documentaries that have given distinction to the most recent past and the new possibilities opened up by portapack video and public access cable television.

Listed at the end of Chapter One are books relating to the general history of documentary and to documentary theory. Each subsequent chapter concludes with a list of documentary films that seem to me most valuable or interesting in the national period under consideration and a listing of additional books that deal with it.

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ONE

WHAT IS DOCUMENTARY?

Documentary is one of three basic creative modes in film, the other two being narrative fiction and experimental avant-garde. Narrative fiction we know as the feature-length entertainment films we see in theaters on a Friday night or on our TV screens; they grow out of literary and theatrical traditions. Experimental or avant-garde films are usually shorts, shown in nontheatrical film societies or series on campuses and in museums; usually they are the work of individual filmmakers and grow out of the traditions of the visual arts.

One approach to the theory, technique, and history of the documentary film might be to describe what the films generally called documentary have in common, and the ways in which they differ from other types of film. Another possible approach would be to consider how documentary filmmakers define the kinds of films they make. Both approaches will be followed in this chapter.

DESCRIPTION

Characteristics documentaries have in common that are distinct from other film types (especially from the fiction film) can be thought of in terms of: 1) subjects; 2) purposes, points of view, or approaches; 3) forms; 4) production

methods and techniques; and 5) the sorts of experiences they offer audiences.

① As for *subjects*—what they're about—documentaries focus on something other than the general human condition involving individual human actions and relationships, the province of narrative fiction and drama. For example, *The Fourth Estate* (1940), a British documentary made by Paul Rotha, is about a newspaper, the London *Times*, whereas Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941) is more concerned with a character modeled on William Randolph Hearst, the powerful newspaper publisher, than the process of publishing newspapers. *City of Gold* (1959), made at the National Film Board of Canada by Wolf Koenig and Colin Low, comprises still photographs taken in Dawson City in 1898 set within a live-action frame of the actualities of present-day Dawson City. In terms of library catalogue headings, *City of Gold* would be listed under "Canada. History. Nineteenth century," "Gold mines and mining. Yukon," "Klondike gold fields," and the like. On the other hand, if *The Gold Rush* (1925), by Charles Chaplin, were a book in the library, it would be shelved under the general heading "Fiction." Though its recreation of the file of prospectors climbing over Chilkoot Pass is remarkably painstaking, *The Gold Rush* is not really about the Klondike Gold Rush of 1898 as much as it is about loneliness and longing, pluck and luck, poverty and wealth, friendship and love. Generally, documentaries are about something specific and factual and concern public matters rather than private ones. The people, places, and events in them are actual, and usually contemporary.

② The second aspect—*purpose/point of view/approach*—is what the filmmakers are trying to say about the subjects of their films. They record social and cultural phenomena they consider significant in order to inform us about these people, events, places, institutions, and problems. In so doing, documentary filmmakers intend to increase our understanding of, our interest in, and perhaps our sympathy for their subjects. They may hope that through this means of informal education they will enable us to live our lives a little more fully and intelligently. At any rate, the purpose or approach of the makers of most documentary films is to record and interpret the actuality in front of the camera and microphone in order to inform and/or persuade us to hold some attitude or take some action in relation to their subjects.

③ Third, the *form* of a film is the formative process, including the filmmakers' original conception, the sights and sounds selected for use, and the structures into which they are fitted. Documentaries, whether scripted in advance or confined to recorded spontaneous action, are derived from and limited to actuality. Documentary filmmakers confine themselves to extracting and arranging from what already exists rather than making up content. They may recreate what they have observed but they do not create totally out of imagination as creators of stories can do. Though documentarians

may follow a chronological line and include people in their films, they do not employ plot or character development as standard means of organization as do fiction filmmakers. The form of a documentary is mainly determined by subject, purpose, and approach. Usually there is no conventional dramaturgical progression from exposition to complication to discovery to climax to denouement. Documentary forms tend to be functional, varied, and looser than those of short stories, novels, or plays. They are more like non-narrative literary forms, such as essays, advertisements, editorials, or poems.

④ Fourth, *production method and technique* refer to the ways images are shot, the sounds recorded, and the two edited together. One basic requirement of documentary is the use of *nonactors* ("real people" who "play themselves") rather than *actors* (who are cast, costumed, and made up to play "roles"). The other basic requirement is shooting on location (rather than on sound stages or studio back lots). In documentaries no sets are constructed. Lighting is usually what exists at the location, supplemented only when necessary to achieve adequate exposure, not for atmosphere or mood. Exceptions to these generalizations occur, of course; but, in general, any manipulation of images or sounds is largely confined to what is required to make the recording of them possible, or to make the result seem closer to the actual than inadequate technique might.

⑤ Finally, the *audience experience* documentary filmmakers seek to provide is generally twofold: an aesthetic experience of some sort, on the one hand, and an effect on attitudes, possibly leading to action, on the other. Though much beauty exists in documentary films, it tends to be more functional, sparse, and austere than the beauties offered in fictional films. Also, documentary filmmaking offers more that could be described as professional *skill* than as personal *style*; communication rather than expression is what the filmmaker is usually after. Consequently, the audience is responding not so much to the artist (who keeps under cover) as to the subject matter of the film (and the artist's more or less covert statements about it). Generally the best way to understand and appreciate the intentions of documentarists is to accept the criterion of the Roman poet Horace that art should both please and instruct. John Grierson stated that in documentary, art is the by-product of a job of work done.

DEFINITION

The English-language documentary could be said to start with American Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*, shot in Canada and released in the United States in 1922. In making his first film, Flaherty's intention was not unlike that of today's home moviemakers: He wanted to show the Eskimos, whom he had gotten to know in his travels, to the folks back home. To

accomplish this purpose, he fashioned a new form of filmmaking. The success of *Nanook* drew Flaherty out of exploring, which had been his profession, and into filmmaking. His second film, *Moana* (1926), prompted John Grierson—a young Scot visiting the United States, exploring in his own way—to devise a new use for the word *documentary*. It was introduced casually, as an adjective, in the first sentence of the second paragraph of Grierson's review of *Moana* for *The New York Sun*: "Of course, *Moana* being a visual account of events in the daily life of a Polynesian youth and his family, has documentary value."¹

Documentary has as its root word *document*, which comes from the Latin *docere*, to teach. As late as 1800, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, documentary meant "a lesson; an admonition, a warning." When Grierson wrote that *Moana* has "documentary value," he would have been thinking of the modern meaning of document—a record which is factual and authentic. For scholars, documents are "primary sources" of information; for lawyers "documentary evidence" is opposed to hearsay or opinion. Perhaps Grierson was also thinking of the French term *documentaire*, used to distinguish serious travelogues from other sorts of films including mere scenic views. Grierson would move the term from his initial use of it back to the earlier one of teaching and propagating, using the "documents" of modern life as materials to spread the faith of social democracy. Flaherty, for his part, continued to document the subjects of his films as he saw them and, to some extent, as they wanted to present themselves to the world and to posterity.

Grierson carried the word and his developing aesthetic theory and sense of social purpose back to Great Britain. Beginning with his own first film, *Drifters*, in 1929, British documentary advanced to full status. Most of the characteristics we associate with the word documentary and see evident in the films to which it is applied were present by the mid-thirties.

Documentary, then, as an artistic form, is a technique and style that originated in motion pictures. There are still photographic precursors and analogues, to be sure: the Civil War photographs of Mathew Brady, the remarkable photographic documentation of turn-of-the-century New York City by Jacob Riis, and the photographs made during the Depression for the United States Farm Security Administration by Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Ben Shahn, and others. Documentary radio appeared in the early thirties in pioneering broadcasts of the British Broadcasting Corporation and in the American "March of Time" weekly series; documentary television (which usually means documentary films made for television) is prevalent. In literature the concept of documentary has established itself as the nonfiction novel (Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* and Norman Mailer's *The Prisoner's Song*) and in newspaper reporting in the late 1960s and early 1970s as the "new journalism" (Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, Hunter Thompson's *Hell's Angels*, or Norman Mailer's *The Armies of the Night*). The

documentary idea is by now pervasive. But *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* offers as the primary meaning of documentary: "n. A documentary film."

Rather than documentary, however, Frances Flaherty chose to call what she had helped her husband create "the film of discovery and revelation." This seems appropriate for the work of a man who had begun his filmmaking while exploring the Hudson Bay region looking for iron ore. Notice the observational bias of her phrase, its implied emphasis on seeing. Flaherty was primarily concerned with what the camera could discover and reveal. "All art is a kind of exploring," Mrs. Flaherty quoted her husband as saying. "To discover and reveal is the way every artist sets about his business."²

Flaherty's films were created more in the camera than on the cutting bench. To him, editing was not the central creative act of filmmaking that it is for many filmmakers. In his silent films Flaherty cut together long-running takes to give continuous view of the essential action. He never really understood sound editing and had to rely on others to help edit his sound films.

Grierson's definition of documentary was "the creative treatment of actuality."³ Flaherty would certainly have accepted *creative* and *actuality*, but *treatment of* suggests one way in which his and Grierson's filmmaking methods differed. Grierson's bias was analytical; his emphasis was on editing.

Documentary has always allowed for a distinction between shooters and cutters, Flahertyites and Griersonites. If Flaherty and Grierson agreed that actuality was the base or subject of documentary, they differed in their techniques of recording and presenting it. Grierson's way permitted footage shot by others to be made into a Griersonian documentary; Flaherty shot, or at least completely controlled the shooting of, his major films.

Instead of filmmaking methods, other documentarians have centered their definitions around the purposes, functions, and effects of documentary. Paul Rotha, for example, one of the early documentary filmmakers alongside Grierson and historian of the British movement, offered what may at first appear merely a verbose and less catchy rephrasing of Grierson's "creative treatment of actuality." But Rotha's "The use of the film medium to interpret creatively and in social terms the life of the people as it exists in reality"⁴ seems to allow for nonactuality. Indeed, Rotha did not exclude the use of actors and studios from documentary as long as the filmmaker's purpose was to help a society function better, to contribute to more satisfying lives for its people.

Basil Wright, one of the earliest and most loyal of Grierson's lieutenants, offered a frank definition that may have nettled Grierson. Wright wrote that documentary is "a method of approach to public information;" its function "to be in the forefront of policy."⁵ This characterizes very well what British documentarians of the 1930s were actually doing. What Grierson might not have liked was the public acknowledgment that it was the

documentarians who chose the topics and problems about which documentaries would be made, and who suggested ways in which these topics might be considered or these problems solved. In other words, British documentary filmmakers were directing public attention to what they considered important, promoting their view of it, and suggesting what they thought ought to be done about it. A member of Parliament might well have asked (and some did), "By whose consent are documentary filmmakers in the forefront of policy? Who gave them this right?"

Willard Van Dyke, an American documentarian whose work also began in the thirties (his most famous film is *The City*, 1939, which he co-directed with Ralph Steiner), once observed in informal conversation that he thought defining documentary a simple matter. In his view documentary is film intended to bring about change in the audience—change in their understanding, their attitudes, and possibly their actions. To the objection that Flaherty's films didn't seem designed to bring about social change, Van Dyke replied that Flaherty's consistent subject selection of people living in simpler, earlier ways of life implied a belief. Flaherty was in fact arguing, Van Dyke felt, that we need to become more like those people; that we must adhere to the age-old verities reflected in nature, in family, and in the work necessary for survival.

Among the various definitions of documentary, one offered by Raymond Spottiswoode in *A Grammar of the Film*, first published in 1935, seems to me among the most adequate; certainly it applies quite satisfactorily to documentaries of the 1930s. For Spottiswoode "The documentary film is in subject and approach a dramatized presentation of man's relation to his institutional life, whether industrial, social or political; and in technique a subordination of form to content."⁶ This definition contains some of the same terms as my five-part formula (presented in the "Description" section)—subject, approach, technique, and form. Spottiswoode does not acknowledge as part of documentary the filmmakers' social purposes or their concern with the effects of their films on audiences. He wrote his book as an Oxford University student. He was subsequently hired by Grierson at the General Post Office Film Unit as a "tea boy"—a general assistant, what we could call a gopher ("go for" this and that). According to a popular anecdote, when Grierson read *A Grammar of the Film* he decided that Spottiswoode had better remain in that humble position a while longer. Grierson regarded the purposes and effects of films of ultimate importance.

In my own attempts to arrive at a working definition of documentary, I have tended to give more weight to the actuality of the material than to the purposes for which that material is used or its possible effects on audiences. It seems to me that documentary filmmakers have in common their desire to record actuality. They select and shape representations of that actuality in order to (1) communicate insights, achieve beauty, and offer understanding (Flaherty), or (2) improve social, political, or economic con-

ditions (Grierson). To elaborate a bit, a catechism of documentary could go something like this:

- Q. What is documentary for?
- A. To record actuality.
- Q. Why would one want to do that?
- A. To inform people about it.
- Q. Inform to what ends?
- A. *Either* to affect our understanding—to change, increase, reinforce it—which may (but is not necessarily designed to) lead to action, may make better persons of us, and which may in turn make the world a better place to live in (Flaherty); *or* to make better citizens of us and to move us to collective action in order to make a better society (Grierson).

In addition to, or instead of, describing and defining documentary, as I've been attempting to do, it is possible to understand it simply as all of those films that have been called documentary. A historical survey of the total corpus of (the mostly English-language) documentary comprises the remaining chapters of this book. The final two sections of this chapter outline intellectual contexts out of which documentary came and discuss those films made before the 1920s which contain documentary-like aspects.

INTELLECTUAL CONTEXTS

Though various forms of nonfiction film preceded and existed alongside the story film, the latter early became the main line of both film art and film industry. In aesthetic terms, the fictional motion picture is an extension of nineteenth-century artistic forms: literature, theater, and photography. The documentary mode appeared, was invented in a sense, to meet new artistic and communication needs arising in the twentieth century. Documentary is purposive; it is intended to achieve something in addition to entertaining audiences and making money. This purposiveness is reflected in the four traditions Paul Rotha identified in his seminal book of theory and history, *Documentary Film* (1935), as feeding into documentary: naturalist (romantic), newsreel, propagandist, realist (continental).⁷

→ The beginning of the naturalist (romantic) tradition, exemplified by the films of Robert Flaherty, roughly paralleled the development of anthropology as a social science. Sir James Frazer, a Scot who lived from 1854 to 1941, was the pioneer. His monumental survey of the evolution of cultures, *The Golden Bough*, was published in 1890 in two volumes; the twelve-volume edition appeared between 1911 and 1915. (Flaherty began to film the *Eskimos* in 1913.)

Contemporary with Frazer was Franz Boas (1858–1942), a German-born American anthropologist and ethnologist. Boas maintained that the

immediate task of anthropology should be to record endangered cultures that might soon vanish. He stressed the specifics of each culture and taught that only after extensive data had been collected through fieldwork could any theories be put forward. Fieldwork has been a foundation of anthropology ever since. (Though Flaherty had no training as an anthropologist, he approximated fieldwork more closely than any filmmaker preceding him, living with and observing the Inuit of the Hudson Bay region many years before filming them.)⁸

Boas' work was followed by that of Polish-born Bronislaw Malinowski, who lived from 1884 to 1942. (Flaherty lived from 1884 to 1951.) Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* was published in 1922 (the year *Nanook of the North* was released). It was about the people of the Trobriand Islands, located off the coast of New Guinea. Margaret Mead (1901–1978), published her *Coming of Age in Samoa* in 1928. (Flaherty's *Moana*, dealing with the Samoans, was released in 1926.) In the next chapter, the history of documentary proper will begin with the naturalist tradition.

The newsreel tradition came out of the phenomenal expansion of journalism in the twentieth century. Mass circulation newspapers (and a practicable theory for radio transmission) appeared about the same time as the movies—1896.⁹ The popular press, with its dramatization of the news, functioned not only as dispenser of information but as informal educator for millions of avid readers. Newsreels appeared in movie theaters in regular weekly form from 1910 on. They were simply an extension into motion pictures of equivalents to the rotogravure sections of the tabloids. They are touched upon in Chapter Three.

The concept and term *propaganda*, Rotha's third tradition, goes back at least to the *Congregatio de propaganda fide* (Congregation for propagating the faith), a committee of Cardinals established by Pope Gregory XV in 1622. A subsequent use of propaganda grew out of the revolutionary theory set forth by German political philosopher and socialist Karl Marx (1818–1883). Propaganda became a key concern of Russian communist leader Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870–1924). Following the October revolution of 1917, the new government in Russia—Union of Soviet Socialist Republics—was the first to make sustained, extensive, and coordinated peacetime use of film propaganda. Modern interest in propaganda is related to the intellectual disciplines of sociology, social psychology, and political science.

Rotha's final tradition, realist (continental), emerged as part of the European avant-garde of the 1920s, headquartered in Paris. One of its preoccupations was finding artistic means for dealing with the interrelatedness of time and space. This modern understanding, originating in the physical sciences, was enunciated by Max Planck in his quantum mechanics, by Albert Einstein in his theory of relativity, and by others beginning about the turn of the century. Another preoccupation of the avant-garde was with expressing the understanding of the unconscious human mind offered by Sig-

mund Freud, Carl Jung, and others in the new psychological science at about the same time. The contributions of the avant-garde to documentary will be the subject of Chapter Four.

PRE-DOCUMENTARY ORIGINS

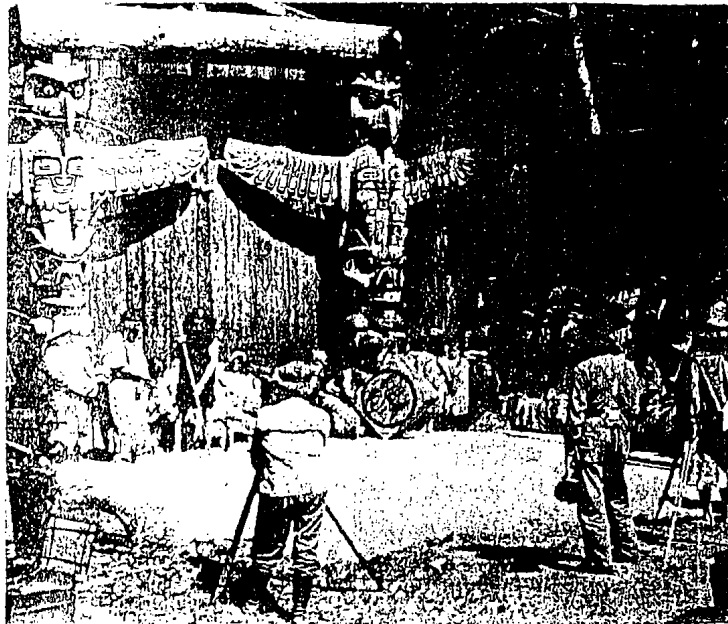
Depending on how one defines documentary, it could be said to have begun with the birth of film itself. The filmed recordings of actuality in the experiments of technicians at the Edison laboratory in West Orange, N.J., might qualify. For example, the sneeze of an employee named Fred Ott was filmed in 1893 and two of the workers dancing to phonograph music can be viewed during an attempt to synchronize sight with sound in 1896. Closer in content and approach to subsequent documentaries are the first films produced by Louis Lumière and projected for paying customers in Paris on December 28, 1895. They included *The Arrival of a Train at the Station*, *Feeding the Baby*, and *Workers Leaving the Factory*. A member of the audience at this showing is supposed to have exclaimed of the film being projected: "It is life itself!"



Workers Leaving the Factory (France, 1895, Louis Lumière). National Film Archive, Stills Library.

In the first years of the motion picture that followed, films were mostly similar brief recordings showing everyday life, circus and variety acts, and skits. Only Georges Méliès used specially conceived narrative and fantasy to any extent in the films made before 1900, and even he began by recording snippets of life on the streets of Paris (*Place de L'Opéra, Boulevard des Italiens*, both 1896). Gradually, as the novelty of the moving photographic image began to pale, the actualities recorded by filmmakers were selected for extra-cinematic interest.

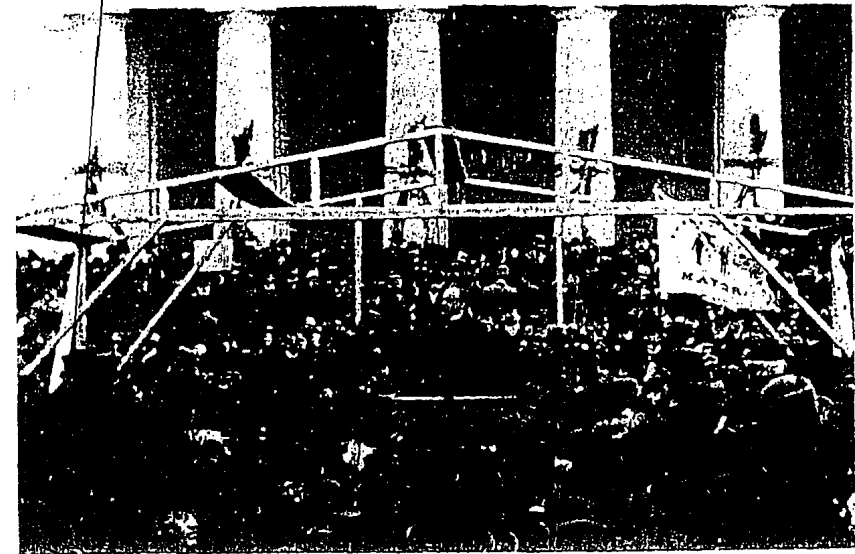
Foreign and exotic subjects had a strong appeal. Traveling projectionists or cameramen of the Lumière organization roamed widely, showing "scenic views" of the Eiffel Tower and Parisian boulevards to Russians or Spaniards, for example. While in Russia, they photographed troika rides and Cossacks, and in Spain, Flamenco dancing and bull fights, to be shown to audiences in France and elsewhere. In addition to such early travelogue forms—*Moscow Glad in Snow*, 1909, is a surviving French example (produced by Pathé Frères); *The Durbar at Delhi*, 1911, a British one—were filmed reports of exploratory and anthropological expeditions, more serious in purpose and educative in effect—*With Scott in the Antarctic*, 1913, is a British



Production still taken during shooting of *In the Land of the Head-Hunters* (U.S., 1914, Edward S. Curtis)—Curtis operating the camera. Courtesy of Thomas Burke Memorial Washington State Museum.

example, made by Herbert Ponting. *In the Land of the Head-Hunters*, 1914, is an American one, made by Edward S. Curtis. About the Kwakiutl Indians of the Pacific Northwest, it was the most ambitious experiment of its sort up to that time. Curtis was not only a professional photographer but a trained and experienced ethnologist. Although working quite separately from Flaherty, he was headed in a similar direction. Flaherty met Curtis and saw his film in 1915.

The newsreel tradition may be said to have begun in France with Louis Lumière's *Excursion of the French Photographic Society to Neuville*, made in 1895. Called "interest films" at first, the subjects quickly became events of greater newsworthiness. Many of them featured heads of state and ceremonial occasions. Some examples are: the crowning of a czar (*Coronation of Nicholas II*, 1896), the campaign of a presidential candidate (*William McKinley at Home*, 1896), and the final rites for a queen (*The Funeral of Queen Victoria*, 1901). Warfare was another frequent subject. The Spanish-American War (*Dewey Aboard the "Olympia" at Manila, Tenth U.S. Infantry Disembarking*, both 1898), the Boxer Rebellion (*The Assassination of a British Sentry, Attack on a China Mission*, both 1900), and the Russo-Japanese War (*The Battle of the Yalu, Attack on a Japanese Convoy*, both 1904) had films made about them—though these were mostly reenactments rather than actualities. Among other examples that have lasted down to the present are *Launching of "H.M.S. Dreadnought"*



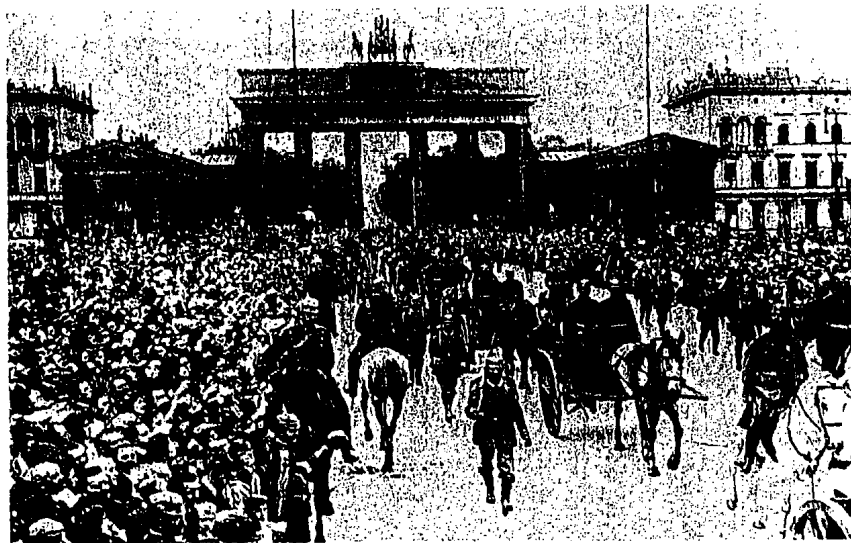
McKinley's Inaugural Address (U.S., 1896, probably the Edison Company). Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archives.

1909). The newsreel in weekly form was begun by Charles Pathé of France in 1910.

Isolated examples of what might be called propaganda films, in Rotha's sense of the term, appeared before the outbreak of World War I in 1914. In the United States, the Department of the Interior produced and distributed motion pictures as early as 1911 to entice Eastern farmers to move to the newly opened agricultural areas of the West. The Civil Service Commission used a film, *Won Through Merit*, in a recruiting campaign in 1912.¹⁰ In the same year the city of Cleveland had a movie made as part of a campaign to alleviate slum conditions.¹¹

When America entered the war in 1917, training films were produced to instruct troops in certain activities. Propaganda films were intended to inspire military personnel and civilians alike with hatred of the enemy and desire for victory. *Pershing's Crusaders*, *America's Answer*, and *From Forest to France* were used to boost morale and the sale of war bonds.¹² Newsreels took on propaganda dimensions and the filmic documentation of warfare was much more comprehensive and skillful (and actual) than in preceding wars. *The Battle of the Somme* (1916), made by J.B. McDowell and Geoffrey Malins, and *The Western Front* (1919), are British examples.

The continental realist tradition, as Rotha called it, was an aspect of the avant-garde movement of the 1920s. Only a few earlier films (perhaps



Newsreel of Berlin, probably 1919, following World War I. Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive.

Romance of the Railway, 1907, by Charles Urban) might be related to that creative line.

Of Rotha's four traditions—naturalist, newsreel, propaganda, continental realist—it is with the naturalist tradition and the work of Robert Flaherty that the next chapter begins. Newsreel and propaganda follow in Chapter Three and continental realist is covered in Chapter Four.

NOTES

¹John Grierson (as "The Moviegoer"), "Flaherty's Poetic Moana," *The New York Sun*, February 8, 1926. Reprinted in Lewis Jacobs, ed., *The Documentary Tradition* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1979), pp. 25–26, and in Forsyth Hardy, ed., *Grierson on the Movies* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1981), pp. 23–25.

²Frances Flaherty, "Robert Flaherty: Explorer and Film Maker: The Film of Discovery and Revelation" (mimeographed, 15pp., c. 1958), p. 1. This is the text for a lecture-screening Mrs. Flaherty gave on a number of occasions following her husband's death.

³Quoted in Paul Rotha, in collaboration with Sinclair Road and Richard Griffith, *Documentary Film* (New York: Hastings House, Publishers, 1970), p. 70.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵Basil Wright, "Documentary To-Day," *The Penguin Film Review*, No. 2 (January 1947), 37–44.

⁶Raymond Spottiswoode, *A Grammar of the Film: An Analysis of Film Technique* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950), p. 289.

⁷Rotha, *Documentary Film*, p. 7.

⁸Claudia Springer, "Ethnographic Circles: A Short History of Ethnographic Film," *The Independent*, 7, No. 11 (December 1984), 13–18.

⁹Nicholas Pronay and D.W. Spring, eds., *Propaganda, Politics and Film, 1918–45* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982), p. 13.

¹⁰James E. Gibson, "Federal Government," *Sixty Years of 16mm Film* (Evanston, Ill.: Film Council of America, 1954), pp. 148–60.

¹¹Lewis Jacobs, *The Rise of the American Film* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1939), p. 152.

¹²Gibson, "Federal Government," p. 149.

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TWO BEGINNINGS

The Americans and Popular Anthropology, 1922-1929

THE WORK OF ROBERT FLAHERTY

Between 1910 and 1915, at the time Edward Curtis (mentioned in Chapter One) was making *In the Land of the Head-Hunters* in western Canada, another American, Robert J. Flaherty, was exploring and mapping in the Hudson Bay region. Flaherty was employed to search for iron ore by Sir William Mackenzie, the great developer of the northern wilderness ("the Cecil Rhodes of Canada," Flaherty called him). Though he found some iron ore, the deposit was not rich enough to tempt anyone to try to mine and transport it. In the course of his travels Flaherty discovered the main island of the Belcher group, which was named after him. But the most important discovery of his expeditions was how to make a new kind of motion picture. Through this discovery he would reveal to the rest of the world the far north country and its friendly inhabitants, the Eskimos, on whom he depended for his very existence.

It was on his third expedition in 1913 that Flaherty, encouraged by Mackenzie, took along motion picture equipment to record what he saw. He shot some 70,000 feet (almost twelve hours) of the Eskimos, their activities, and their surroundings. After he had returned to Toronto and begun to edit, he dropped a cigarette onto a mass of film on the floor. Since it was

